

THE
NECESSITY
OF FOUNDING
VILLAGES
CONTIGUOUS TO HARBOURS,
FOR THE
EFFECTUAL ESTABLISHMENT
OF
FISHERIES
ON THE
WEST COAST OF SCOTLAND
AND THE HEBRIDES.

WITH A
REFUTATION OF THE REASONING ON THAT SUBJECT OF
ROBERT FALL, ESQ. OF DUNBAR, IN A PAMPHLET
ADDRESSED TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE
OF COMMONS ON THE FISHERIES.

BY A MEMBER OF THE HIGHLAND SOCIETY
IN LONDON.

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The colony of Holland was originally

settled by the Dutch, who were

from the overflows of the Rhine, the

Meuse, and other great rivers, and thence

over the water to the North Sea.

When the waters retired in summer, it

afforded fresh pastures, but was

otherwise by no means fertile. The inhabi-

ants, who laboured in summer, and

the lower grounds, for the sake of grain,

were forced in winter to re-

move higher up the country, in order to

procure better food for themselves and

their cattle, which they fed on the

marshes on the sea coast, where they

reared a vast number of cattle, and

capable of supporting a vast number

of cattle, some of them as late as 1600,

the sea was so low, and the vegetation

proved successful. Some years ago, the

of time, induced to settle permanently

on the sea coast, for the greater con-

venience of the cattle, and the

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IT seems to be generally acknowledged now, that well established and extensive Fisheries are not only one of the best Nurseries for Seamen,* but also certain sources of National Prosperity and Population. If proofs were requisite, they might be deduced in abundance from the History of the Dutch Republic.

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* See Appendix to a late Publication by Mr. FRASER, of LOVAT, on the various Nurseries for Seamen.

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THE country of Holland was originally a marsh, generally covered with water, from the overflowings of the Rhine, the Maese, and other great rivers, and frozen over for the greatest part of the Winter. When the waters retired in Summer, it afforded indeed excellent pasture, but was otherwise by no means fertile. The inhabitants, therefore, who settled in Summer on the lower grounds, for the sake of grazing cattle, were forced in Winter to remove higher up the country, in order to procure subsistence and shelter for themselves and their cattle, which the frozen marshes on the sea-coast were then incapable of affording. Hunger and Necessity drove some of them at last to search the sea for food; and the experiment proved successful. Some were, in process of time, induced to settle permanently on the sea-coast, for the greater convenience

niency of Fishing; and they soon found, that after reserving a stock sufficient for their own consumption, they could spare enough to barter with their neighbours for various articles of food and cloathing, and afterwards of conveniency and luxury.

Thus the Hollanders became expert Fishermen. Fishing was first the sole occupation of the inhabitants of the sea-coast of that country; while those who were more inland followed their original employment. In time, they enlarged the size of their fishing-boats, and not only caught fish at a greater distance from home, but exported them to other countries, and exchanged them for the various productions of those countries respectively.

Thus from Fishermen they became Sailors and Merchants, and their Fish became the

the medium of Commerce between other countries. They exchanged the wine, oil, fruits, silks, and other articles of the South, which they had received in exchange for their Fish, for the iron, copper, timber, hemp, and other commodities of the North, for which they had also bartered Fish. Their fishing hamlets grew into large and flourishing towns. Holland became the centre of Commerce, the great storehouse of the various productions and manufactures of other countries, and the Dutch have, with great propriety, been stiled the Carriers of Europe.

It is well known, that the Province of Holland, with a soil unfertile, and not perfectly well cultivated, contains more wealth and inhabitants than several times its extent of any country in Europe.

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It is also worthy of remark, that though that celebrated Republic has made so conspicuous a figure in the History of the World, and at one time maintained a war successively against the United Powers of France and England, and contains such a multitude of inhabitants within so small a compass, yet one-fifth part of the surface of its soil still remains in the state of nature: A clear proof that it owes its present flourishing condition---not to industry in Agriculture or Arts; but to Fishing and Commerce.

It is the generally received opinion, that it is indebted for its extraordinary population and wealth to its revolt and separation from the Spanish Monarchy, and its consequent establishment as an independent Republic; and that then it rose at once from insignificance, poverty, and wretchedness, to wealth and greatness. But this

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was not by any means the case. The towns of Holland had been rich and populous ; its sailors numerous, hardy, and skilful ; and its quantity of shipping greater than that of any country of its extent in Europe, long before that memorable period.

It was the number and opulence of the inhabitants of that country, added, no doubt, to some advantages of local situation ; that enabled them to make so long and so successful a struggle against the powerful exertions of the Spanish Crown to reduce them to obedience.

THEIR skill in maritime affairs ; the resources for ship-building with which Commerce had supplied them ; and the spirit and hardy perseverance of their seamen, enabled them, soon after their revolt, to become masters of the dominions of Philip
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the Second in the East Indies. From this new source indeed they drew a surprising increase of wealth ; and perhaps their trade with the East Indies, and a little (comparatively speaking) with the West Indies, are the only accessions to the Commerce and Wealth of the United Netherlands since their Independence. But their towns had risen to considerable consequence some centuries before ; and what is much to the present purpose, they had risen to that consequence, against almost every disadvantage of climate, soil, and government, by their Fisheries alone, by which they made so great an addition to the stock of human food.

BUT the benefits which result from Fisheries, are so generally acknowledged, that it is unnecessary to dwell longer on this point.

II.

I THEREFORE proceed to another proposition, which is equally certain with the preceding, viz. that the Coasts of the West Highlands of Scotland and the Hebrides (to which the following observations are chiefly confined) are admirably adapted for being the seat of extensive Fisheries, for which they possess many advantages superior to most other countries. The truth of this proposition also seems now to be generally received in this country.

If it were otherwise, incontestible proofs of its truth might be drawn from the vast shoals of various kinds of fish with which the sea round those coasts abound; such as herrings, mackarel, cod, ling, tusk, haddock, turbot,

turbot, skate, &c. and all of the very best quality; from the many safe, commodious, and capacious inlets, arms of the sea, bays, and harbours, with which their shores are indented; and from the adventurous and enterprising spirit of the inhabitants; their hardy manner of living; the necessity imposed upon many of them by their local situation of being accustomed to boats from their infancy; and above all, their vicinity to the Fishing Grounds.

BUT though the inhabitants of the West Highlands and Islands of Scotland are thus happily situated for the Fisheries, it affords matter of melancholy reflection, that they have hitherto been prevented, by various obstacles which are to them insurmountable, from deriving much advantage from them; and, consequently, this certain
source

source of population and wealth has been hitherto lost to the Nation.

THE chief of those obstacles have been the duties imposed by Government on coals, salt, * and fish; the perplexities, difficulties, and expences arising from Custom-house regulations and salt laws; the difficulties of inland communication, for want of roads and a navigable cut across the Island; and above all, the want of Free Towns or Villages.

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* The reader is referred to the Publication of the Honourable A. FRASER (as mentioned in page 5th) on the Necessity of Coal-fuel, for effectually promoting Northern Agriculture, Fisheries, and Manufactures, and establishing Towns and Villages on the Coast; also to what the Earl of DUNDONALD has published on the Manufacture of Salt at Home, for curing the Fish caught on our own Coasts for Exportation.

This last is of itself sufficient to render every attempt to establish Fisheries on that coast abortive. The removal of this obstacle ought, therefore, to go hand in hand with the attempts to establish Fisheries. This must appear in a striking light to every person who is informed that there is not a spot of ground (excepting three, to be here after-mentioned) where a Fisherman, Artisan, or Tradesman, can assure himself of a permanent habitation, from the Mull of Cantyre to the Northern Extremity of Scotland, without taking a lease of a farm, and then only during the continuance of his lease: Such is matter of fact on those western shores of the kingdom, which, taking the indentures and inlets of the sea together, form a sea-coast of more than seven hundred miles in extent; besides the Islands, which, in their present rude and uncultivated

tivated state, contain between fifty and sixty thousand inhabitants.

IN this extensive tract of country, therefore, during the continuance of its present state, there can only be one class of inhabitants, consisting of Farmers and Graziers, comprehending Labourers, Herdsmen, and Servants, to the utter exclusion of Fishers, Artists, Manufacturers, and Merchants.

A COUNTRY of this description can receive little benefit from the more advanced state of her happier neighbours. No person from any other quarter can have any footing in it, but by taking a lease of a farm; and even to give him such a footing, one or more of the old inhabitants must be dispossessed, and consequently driven out of the country, in order to make room for him.

NEITHER

NEITHER will the natural inhabitants of such a country, circumscribed as they now are, apply themselves permanently to Fishing, Arts, or Commerce. Such of them as make any attempts of that nature, as soon as they have scraped together a little money, either take a farm, in order to have a fixed habitation, or remove to some other country.

BESIDES, a Farmer never ought to be a Fisherman. The whole time and attention of a Farmer ought to be employed in preparing and tilling his ground; securing its produce; disposing of the overplus, not necessary for his own consumption; rearing and feeding his cattle; and the various other occupations of his farm; from which, if he understands his business, he will seldom find much intermission.

ON the other hand, a Fisherman ought to be employed for the greatest part of, and indeed for the whole year, in catching and curing his Fish, and sending it to market; in preparing his nets, lines, hooks, and other fishing implements; his casks and salt; his shipping, rigging, and provisions, &c. The inhabitants therefore of the West Highlands and Hebrides are for ever excluded from sharing the blessings which Providence has lavished on their Coast, until some free towns or villages are erected amongst them. *Nay, it is much to be dreaded, that such fruitless attempts may prove hurtful, as their miscarriage may be attributed, by persons unacquainted with the real state of the country, to some natural obstructions, that render the establishment of Fisheries on that Coast impracticable; and the public, as well as individual adventurers, may be thereby*

thereby diverted from ever turning their attention to these objects again.

THERE are but two or three exceptions to the above general description of the country under consideration. One is the village and port of Stornoway, in the Island of Lewis, where some Dutch Fishermen were settled in the last century ; and and during the short time they were allowed to remain there,* they taught so much skill in Fishing to the inhabitants, that it afterwards continued to be a kind of Fishing, although not a Free Village.

ABOUT thirty years ago, when the late Earl of Seaforth was under age, Doctor Mackenzie, who was a Trustee for managing

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* They were driven off in the Dutch war, in the reign of Charles II.

naging that Nobleman's estate, encouraged the inhabitants of Stornoway to build houses of stone and lime, covered with flates, instead of the hovels they formerly inhabited, marking out the plan of a town with regular streets. The encouragement the Doctor held forth consisted in an offer of a lease of nineteen years to every person who undertook to build a house, according to the plan marked out; and an engagement at the expiration of that lease, to convert it into a copyhold, or to grant the leaseholder an indemnification for the expences of building, according to appraisement.

THAT was, properly speaking, the first attempt to erect Stornoway into a free village. Several houses were built, and copyholds granted in consequence of the above encouragement; and within these

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two years the present Proprietor of the Island of Lewis,* Francis Humberstone Mackenzie, Esq. of Seaforth, has, in the most liberal manner, offered copyhold rights to all who should build houses in Stornoway ; and has published advertisements for that purpose in the newspapers of England, as well as Scotland. And there is every reason to hope, that beneficial consequences will result from this encouragement, both to the Public, by promoting the Fisheries, and to the Proprietor, as justly due to his public spirit. This being a singular instance on the Western Coast, deserves particular attention.

I AM informed that some encouragement of a similar nature has lately been given by the Proprietor of Bowmore in Ilay ; and also by Capt. Macleod, of Harris, at Roudale, in that island. These are the

* The same offer is made to all who build on any part of the coast of the Island of Lewis.

the only spots in all the extensive tract above mentioned, where any such encouragement has yet been offered ; and it is obvious, that if Stornoway, Bowmore, and Roudale, had already grown into large villages, which is far from being the case, these stations would be far too few for the purpose of establishing extensive Fisheries.

Two gentlemen, who have lately reported the State of the Highlands and Hebrides, Mr. Knox and Dr. Anderson, have proposed each a different plan for the erection of towns on that Coast.

MR. Knox's plan is upon the whole more adapted to the real state of the country ; at the same time it is observable, that Mr. Knox seems to have been carried too far by a systematical dislike to an insular situation for any of his towns. Some of the

the continental situations, which he proposes for the establishment of Fishing Villages, are no doubt extremely proper; but it is also expedient that some of the intended villages should be on islands. Some of the islands are much more fertile and populous than the opposite continent, and capable of becoming still more so. They also derive many peculiar advantages from their insular situation, too obvious to enumerate here; and some of them are more directly in the tract of the trade from the Pentland Firth and the Baltic to the Clyde, St. George's Channel, and Ireland. Thus---

1st, STORNOWAY, on the Island of Lewis, is incomparably well situated for becoming a village; and in time, with proper encouragement, a large town.

2d, ONE of the Harbours on the West side of the Isle of Sky, seems equally well adapted for the same purpose.

3d, TOBIRMORY, in the Island of Mull, from the commodiousness and safety of its harbour, is already much frequented by shipping, and well known to many Officers of the Navy as a convenient and desirable station for shelter; and from that circumstance, and its central situation, seems designed by Nature for a sea-port. And,

4th, BOWMORE, in the Island of Ilay, already mentioned.

THESE four, with four of Mr. Knox's Continental Situations, would be more proper for the foundation of Towns than
Mr.

Mr. Knox's plan of having all on the Continent of Scotland.

UPON the whole, with a confidence grounded not only on general reasoning, but on an accurate knowledge of the country under consideration, acquired during a residence in it of many years, I do not hesitate to pronounce, that the want of free towns or villages, at proper harbours, will prove an unfurmountable barrier against the introduction of Fisheries, Manufactures, or Commerce, into the Highlands of Scotland or the Hebrides; as well as a great hindrance to any solid improvement in Agriculture or Grazing.

THE distressed situation of the unfortunate inhabitants of that country seems now very deservedly to engage the public attention. A Committee of the House of

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Commons was appointed in the last Session of Parliament, to inquire into the State of the Fisheries on the British Coasts; a subject with which the situation of the Highlanders and Islanders of Scotland must always be intimately connected.---

The Committee have pursued their inquiries with a diligence, perseverance, impartiality, and humanity, which do them honour; and which became them, as selected for so important a trust by the great body of the Representatives of the People.---

The Reports which they have made to the House of Commons, and which have been printed by desire of the House, contain ample information on the various branches of the British Fisheries. It is to be hoped that the Legislature thus informed, will adopt such wise and salutary measures as will effectually establish the British Fisheries on a permanent footing: So that the inhabi-

Inhabitants of the United Kingdom may derive from the seas which surround them, those advantages which from Nature belong to them, and which have been so long ingrossed by other nations.

A PAMPHLET has lately been written by Mr. Fall, a gentleman of Dunbar, addressed to the Committee of the House of Commons appointed to inquire into the State of the Fisheries. Out of a great number of sections into which this pamphlet is divided, I shall select two, which appear to be of a very dangerous nature; *because* they have a tendency to *mislead* the Public on two points of *great importance*.

IN one he proposes a very improper mode for the encouragement of Boat-fishing on the West Coast; and in the other he argues against the expediency or even

practicability of building towns on that Coast.

EVERY person acquainted with the Western Coast will easily discover the fallacy of Mr. Fall's reasoning on these two points. His positions are wrong---his arguments vague---and his conclusions consequently erroneous.

Let us first consider what he says against building towns. His reasoning on this subject goes on a supposition, that there are now a great number of Fishing Villages dispersed all over the country, especially in the neighbourhood of the Fishing Stations; and he urges the inexpediency of attempting to "collect the Fishermen [these are his own words] out of those villages, into a few great towns;" and also the im-
proba-

probability of the success of such attempts.

Now the truth is, that the establishment, not of a great number at first (which Mr. Fall's reasoning leads us to conclude, that he believes are already existing) but of a few such villages, is the great improvement which is most needed in that country; and, without which, it will be in vain to attempt to establish Fisheries on that Coast. For at present there is not a *single Fishing Village*, except Stornoway alone, from the *Mull of Cantyre*, to *Thurso*, in *Caithness*.

Thus the foundation of Mr. Fall's reasoning against the erection of towns on the Hebrides and West Highlands, is taken away. The superstructure which he has attempted to build upon it, must of course tumble down.

As to the few hints he throws out against Dr. Anderson's plan of building towns, if they should be thought just, they signify nothing to the point in question.

EQUALLY vague and ill-founded is Mr. Fall's reasoning in support of his proposed mode of encouraging Boat-fishing on the West Coast. Instead of giving to the poor Highlanders small lots of land, as judiciously suggested in the Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, Mr. Fall, as if perfectly master of the subject, boldly decides that giving them a property in boats, nets, and lines, would be more conducive to their emerging from poverty.

This is still going on the same supposition, that there is in the Highlands and Hebrides a numerous class of people, distinct

ting from Farmers and Graziers, whose chief or sole occupation is Fishing; and settled as such, either collectively in villages, or dispersed over the country.

THERE would certainly be great numbers of this description, if there were free villages where they could settle. But what great purpose would it answer for the promotion of Fisheries, (though it will no doubt be very acceptable to the individual who receives it, if he should even sell it to another) to give a boat to a man who has not a house to inhabit? or if he takes a house, must be a Farmer or Grazier, in order to keep possession of it; and consequently must consider Fishing as only a secondary or subordinate employment, if he can afford to pay it any attention at all, consistently with the care necessary to bestow on his rural occupation?

Mr.

MR. Fall's proposal of giving presents of boats and nets to so many poor Highlanders, to engage them to become Fishermen, is exactly the same kind of policy as if Government wanted to turn New Forest, in Hampshire, into arable land; and should, in order to promote its cultivation, send a hundred ploughs, with corresponding harness, to be distributed as presents among as many disbanded sailors at Portsmouth, by way of engaging them to settle on the New Forest.

I AM afraid if such a mode was pursued by Government, that neither the Nation nor Posterity would give credit to the Minister for having adopted the wisest and most effectual measures for the cultivation of the New Forest, or for engaging the disbanded sailors of this Nation to become Husbandmen; and yet the two cases are exactly parallel.

There

THERE is one *and but one* apology to be made for Mr. Fall. He sets out with acknowledging his *ignorance* of the West Coast of Scotland, and his reasoning proves the sincerity of his acknowledgement. He seems to be well acquainted with the shores of the Firth of Forth; and if the shores of the West Highlands and Hebrides were exactly of the same description, his reasoning might be conclusive. But unfortunately for the inhabitants of the latter, this is far from being the case.

WHEN Mr. Fall takes upon him to frame plans for the West Country of Scotland, of the situation of which he professes his ignorance, and of which he has formed only some loose ideas from the descriptions of others, like a person wandering beyond the extent of his knowledge, he is bewildered. He had therefore acted

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better, if he had confined his observations on the Fisheries to those parts of the country with which he is acquainted; and then his observations might be truly useful, without any danger of misleading others on points with which he is unacquainted himself.

III.

I COME now to a third and last proposition, viz. That if the obstacles which have hitherto obstructed the establishment of Fisheries on the Coast of the West Highlands and Hebrides were removed, those Fisheries might be left almost intirely to themselves.

THE proof of the first proposition is a deduction from the experience of mankind.

THE proof of the second, is an appeal to the natural history and actual situation of the country in question.

BUT the third proposition relates to a state of things not yet existing in that coun-

try, and is therefore incapable of the same kind of proof. We must be satisfied with making suppositions, and tracing their probable consequences from the analogy of other countries; a kind of reasoning which, tho' not amounting to demonstration, may convey a nearly equal conviction to the mind.

LET us then suppose, that all the obstacles above-mentioned were removed---that villages, contiguous to good harbours, and in situations otherwise judiciously chosen, were founded at certain distances along the Coast, where Fishermen, properly so called, might settle; that roads were made through the country to render those villages accessible by land, as their situation rendered them by water; that a navigable cut, which is almost formed by Nature already, were completed from Inverness to Fort-William; whereby an inland navigation would be opened

opened from the Atlantic Ocean to the German Sea, and the transport of provisions, and other necessaries, from the East Coast to the Fishermen of the West Highlands and Hebrides, and of the fish and other produce of the West Coast to the markets of the East, would be so greatly facilitated: Also, that the inhabitants of these villages were permitted to have coals, at an easy charge, * and ready access at all times to salt for curing their Fish; and let us consider what would then be the probable consequences.

THE inhabitants of the West Highlands and Hebrides are by no means deficient in good sense, enterprize, or activity. Instead of emigrating to other countries, they would resort in crouds to settle in the free villages

* The duty on Coals carried coast-ways to those parts amounts to a prohibition as they stand at present.

villages on their own coasts. Their knowledge of the abundance of fish in the surrounding seas would induce them to apply themselves to Fisheries. The facility of procuring firing and salt for curing their fish, of sending the overplus of their fish to market, and receiving provisions and other necessaries in return, would enable them to subsist without becoming Farmers or Graziers; while it contributed at the same time to the promotion of agriculture and inland population; and success would animate their industry.

From the present poverty of the country, their progress at first would, no doubt, be very slow; like that of all infant colonies or establishments.

But after some time, when the first difficulties ever attendant on new enterprises

prizes were overcome, they would advance with an accelerated progression. Their villages would enlarge into towns; new villages would be built; their population would increase; the prospect of living in free villages, and the love of gain, would induce people from different quarters to come and settle among them:-----They would become a rich, flourishing, and happy people.

As in the two last wars they furnished more than their proportion of brave soldiers to the Armies of their Country, so without diminishing the stock, whence that drain was and still would be supplied, they would then afford an equal or rather a much greater proportion of bold and hardy seamen to the British Navy. Thus their trade and consumption would increase the Revenues and promote the Manufactures

manufactures of their Country; and their numbers would add to its glory and security. *

* The above Observations being confined to the West Coast of the Highlands of Scotland and the Hebrides, that is, from the Mull of Cantyre Northwards, no mention has been made of the Herring-Bufs Fishing. The Herring-Buffs are chiefly fitted out from the Towns on the Clyde, and other places to the Southward of the Mull of Cantyre; and therefore the consideration of them did not come immediately within the present design. It was judged proper to make this remark, to prevent silence on the White Herring-Buffs from being misconstrued into a disapprobation of that mode of Fishing, or a denial of the benefits resulting from it to the Public.

For the same reason no mention has been made of the Crinan Canal; because, though it would be of great service to the West Highlands and Hebrides, yet, its beneficial consequences, with respect to the Fisheries, would be chiefly felt by the Buffs of the Clyde; and therefore did not come so directly within the design of these Observations.

F I N I S

